

Statement by Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III on
Raid Against ISIS Amir Hajji Abdullah¹

February 3, 2022

In this statement, U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III recounts the successful American operation to assassinate Hajji Abdullah (also known as Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi), the leader of the Islamic State jihadist group. Austin describes al-Qurayshi's complicity in the 2014 Yazidi Genocide and his centrality in the Islamic State, celebrating his death as an important milestone in the War on Terror.

I am immensely proud of the U.S. forces who conducted an operation against Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, the leader of ISIS.² He detonated an explosive device during the operation, killing himself and members of his family.

The professionalism, skill, and readiness of our troops — honed through relentless rehearsal — has dealt ISIS a severe blow and has helped make our country and our fellow citizens safer.

Al-Qurayshi, also known as Hajji Abdullah, provided near-constant operational guidance to ISIS fighters, [including] the prison break and attack at Hasakah³ and the slaughter of Yazidis in Iraq. He is now off the battlefield and out of command, and cannot threaten any more lives.

I also want to praise the leadership of U.S. Central Command and U.S. Special Operations Command for their superb support [in] the planning and execution of this dangerous mission. I've been involved with enough of these sorts of operations to know how difficult they are to mount and how meticulously they must be planned and resourced.

I know the rest of the Department shares my pride in them and my deepest gratitude.

Let me take this opportunity to note that the Department takes seriously our commitment to avoid civilian harm in the course of our operations. This operation was specifically designed and conducted in a manner to minimize civilian casualties. We know that al-Qurayshi and others at his compound directly caused the deaths of women and children last night. But, given the

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² "ISIS," or the "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria," is the more popular name of the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group. The organization changed its name from ISIS to IS after it declared a "caliphate" in Iraq and Syria in June 2014.

³ On January 20, 2022, the Islamic State launched an attack on the al-Sina Prison in the Syrian city of al-Hasakah to free imprisoned IS leaders and fighters. Hundreds of prisoners managed to escape, though IS forces were defeated ten days later.

complexity of this mission, we will take a look at the possibility [that] our actions may also have resulted in harm to innocent people.

The fight against ISIS continues. Their leader may be gone, but their twisted ideology and their intent to kill, maim, and terrorize still threaten our national security and the lives of countless innocents.

We saw that evil determination in full display during the Hasakah prison break and the fighting that ensued.

And so, we will stay at it... encouraged by the bravery we witnessed last night and emboldened by the knowledge that ISIS, though still very much a viable threat, is now weaker.